Characters

Speaker

Act

SPEAKER

she got her sister to ride wit her to the liquor store / waz most 10:00 awready / wdnt be no more wine till monday / if they misst this. the fog lifted to let her thru˙ red lights faded as she drew near. her sister waited in the car, chewin gum. shakin her head / melissa's loosin her mind. & she chewed harder. in the liquor store wit alla these italians talkin bout wounded knee / what'd they know. damned injuns oughtta be glad they aint dead / waznt geronimo dead. & cochise. they looked at melissa as if she waz somethin they know nothin abt / & the heat of their stares ran her out. two bottles of manishevitz under her arm. she drove home a different way / same as her aunt learned her / to divert attention from her routine / to surprise always a possible attacker by going somewhere / unusual / so they drove way cross town to *the razzmatazz cafe* / a poet's bar / or a bar tended by poets / a poet's enclave / a poet's shadow / somewhere safe to hide / in the bathroom & drink this sweet sweet wine. carol, the sister, squirmed & made faces. poets were boring & boorish. waz not goin to be a good evening. lotsa hands under the table / shared bottles shared lips & promise never manifest. carol waz not excited / but melissa pulled right into the front of *the razzmatazz* / slammed the door / turned quickly her eyes insistin carol get up / join the soiree. oh a soiree. a party for an ol beat poet / a reading of works salvaged from his madness / a coterie of possibles stranglin in tap beer / forgotten lovers. sawdust scavengers articulatin remembered ridiculousness / their fathers dyin / lyin clumsily to someone else they loved / maybe a recant of time in the joint or sanatorium / the halfway house / a railroad car / maybe a poem to the women who were impressed & quickly exhausted by the immensity of their idol's appetites for sacrifice: for naomi. bette. diana. lavinia. for . . . / on & on thru the nite. melissa waz recognized by a self-appointed host / who referred to her as a fine poetess / poet-ess / an inconceivable entity / a non-actual manipulator of language / a feminine peculiarity with language / a less than poet / real / thing / a term / like ‘lady’ or ‘mamselle’ / a rejoinder to the middle ages / an insult. she refused to read. no one got the point. one reluctant visionary established a corner as his own. 5 empty chairs surrounded him. a table covered with sheets of paper / presumably poems / piled or twistin / he too did not read. but he wept / when the celebrity of the 50's attempted to shout a poem to the mirror / not recognizin an audience sides himself. this recluse poet / a table of his own / pulled himself together / read the master poet's work from that very spot / & the two of them / the mad one & his counterpart / exchanged looks of tenderness / neither waz familiar with / the hermit champion left abruptly after pullin melissa outta her seat. melissa knew what waz goin on / he insisted she did not. i didnt call you. he snarled. tuggin her arm up against his chest. I didnt want to see you tonite. he seemed more disappointed than angry / more frightened than fearsome / melissa lingered in the damp of his chest. i wanted to hear some poems. i needed some poems & voices nearby. it's not good to drink alone. & she nodded toward her sister reading *The Daily Life of the Aztecs* under the phone. the poet sighed. so happy she had not said what he knew she meant. she had not declared her love of his being. how she simply wanted to be near him. more importantly she had not said she wanted to know him / like the poems she tossed casually outta her mouth / day after day. the wine. the images / him listening to her murmur worlds. the ol beat poet had stationed himself atop the bar in mismatched shoes / locks that cda been dreads had he known abt bob marley / swallowed his face. everyone waz afraid for him // he might become a fool more easily now than remain the prophet of the new day he had misst by movin too fast / goin the wrong way // rememberin too much or forgettin somethin that cd not be forgotten & so wound itself around his spirit / & the more he forgot, the more twisted he became. everyone knew there waz a secret / fetid & angry. melissa watched all this over the shoulder of her lover / a poet afraid to look at his fate in twenty years / screamin on top of a bar. no ben webster here. this waz not Bird's legacy to be crusted / wantonly inchoate / chucklin about other times / no one cd recall. this poet, holdin melissa. breathin tears & fear on her neck / waz callt smith / & that waz all / just smith. & he commanded the respect of the locals & some cross country knew his work. tight. sparse.

brutal in the one thrusted-ness of his voice. smith waz perhaps an answer to someone sides lissa / someone's searching in *dead lecturer / afrodisia / preface to a 20 volume / golden sardines*. smith waz the other one / the unassigned specter of our lives / with a vocabulary of earlier days / sensibilities of our times / the mixture of the eras created no followin for him / cept melissa & those souls who had lost a space for themselves in the world / lost the languages of the present & muffled their paucity of connection with morphine / began the conversations with sorrow on a toot of cocaine / a syringe. smith waz a businessman / a dealer / which hurt him more than watchin the crazy beat actin up / hurt him like discoverin his cousin dead in the tub / drowned in a nod / his buddy hangin from a water pipe in the 2nd basement of a project / hurt him like melissa, show up uncallt for. melissa bein someone he protected from himself, as best he knew / how. & she refused his good will / his refusal to be / known / as he refused her faith in him. she drank sweet wine down Hwy 101 / as he left / scars lickin in the bronze of his arms. tryin to forget. carol chewin gum. catchin her history like somebody chasin a cockroach / closed her book. marched outta *the razzmatazz* when the ol beatnik began a high mass for his mother / in fronta the hard whiskey shelves just beyond the bar. she had no time for the recently dead / near dead & sufferin. she determined her sister, melissa, cd not join this fraternity of sadness / come-uppances & private martyrdom. carol stalked / thru the swingin doors / pullt melissa from smith. lets go home. this aint shit. the niggers are crazy. all yall gone crazy. look like dead folk kissin. & she waz right. melissa clung to smith / imperceptibly / like somebody passed away. she thot her body thru his blood & caught his cries wit the tip of her tongue. melissa waz not safe. her sister took her home. melissa drunk / carol angry. the ride from potrero to the ocean musta been like judas' carryin on while christ burdened himself for us all / guilt stifled everythin / fog sat down on the curbs / the ocean spat silver on the beach / carol took melissa's bottle away. he aint no good. damn melissa. melissa climbed into her bed by the sea / cried a thousand smiths / each one breakin her skin / so she waz bloody & scraped / she rollt in her blood tryin to kiss him / & when he callt / she sounded regular . . . yes / i'll be there. carol hated her. carol watched shanghai lil makin topsy take the weight. melissa barely made it. she cdnt see / fog & trolly tracks / cop cars & visions of him / she cd hardly make out the corners / but some kinda way she made it down the hill / she sat imaginin smith holdin her / wantin her / finally explainin why / he did her how he did / & she smiled imbecilically / cuz she had lost control / her muscles / her breath / all controlled by somethin else / somethin no good / like smith smilin / smith movin inside her / his beard diggin thru her cheeks / the blood they sucked from each other's flesh / this waz not ordinary / melissa no regular nothin / their embrace cd be murder or a poem / melissa found her way down the street / hills / nothin but hills. here to find smith on top of the hill. where she came from only a river & heavy scents / she took each step like a gift / goin to see the wizard / the body concealin heavens / smith somewhere at the top of this / he grabbed her up / his hair braided a million times / braids fallin from his skull / cheekbones raised to holy angles / his mouth rushin over her / sayin good things / come in. melissa. please. come in. i want to see you. melissa. the blood drippin from his arms / she tried to wipe into her skin / she rubbed gainst him furiously / & he liked it / pullt round / pullt away / mad & soft / like uh huh / you dont understand. melissa / how much i need / melissa kisst his calves / licked ankles / he went to the typewriter / she moved with his legs / her hands & mouth caressin like water / her tongue followed his tears down his face. the poem/ crawled out. p˙s˙ he never callt her again. years later he published several volumes of her poems.

END OF PLAY.